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Letter dated 4 February 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Cyprus to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the letter dated 28 January 1998 (A/52/779-S/1998/81) addressed to you by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations in connection with the construction by the Government of Cyprus of the military airbase in Paphos.

In this context, I should like to emphasize the self-evident principle that no country can relinquish its right of self-defence or neglect its responsibility to protect its citizens from aggression. As a sovereign and independent State, the Republic of Cyprus does nothing more than exercise this inalienable right, which is recognized in the Charter of the United Nations and general international law, through the enhancement of the defensive capabilities of the National Guard. This is especially true, given the fact that the Republic of Cyprus has been the victim of Turkish aggression, as a result of which 37 per cent of its territory remains under military occupation since 1974.

In a series of resolutions the United Nations has repeatedly demanded respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey has failed to comply with these resolutions and continues to occupy militarily the northern part of the island. The Secretary-General has described the occupied area as "one of the most densely militarized areas in the world".

After almost 24 years of impasse, during which Turkey has steadfastly refused to withdraw or even reduce the occupation forces, the need for the Republic of Cyprus to take sufficient measures to defend itself in the face of this continuing threat becomes even more imperative than before. The Government of the Republic of Cyprus, like any other Government, has both the

responsibility and the duty to ensure the security of its citizens who live in the shadow of a long-standing serious threat.

In its efforts to redress to some extent the overwhelming imbalance, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus has undertaken an effort to bolster the island's defences. It is sufficient to mention that Turkey maintains in the occupied area of the island a force of 36,000 heavily armed troops, which are constantly upgraded and modernized. All the units of the occupying force are at the level of 100 per cent battle readiness and manning. The huge offensive capability of the occupation army is spearheaded by more than 300 modern tanks. Air support is available at a less than 10-minute distance from the neighbouring Turkish mainland, where a force of at least 80 F-16s and other combat aircraft are stationed.

The Republic of Cyprus does not possess its own airforce. The Government of the Republic has, on numerous occasions, stated publicly that the base will be used only to defend the island in the event of a further Turkish aggression. It would be naive to argue that Cyprus intends to launch an offensive against Turkey. The only objective is to provide Cyprus with a more credible defence in the face of the continuing illegal Turkish occupation and repeated threats against the security of Cyprus.

The reaction of Turkey to the upgrading of Cyprus's defence has the sole intention of maintaining the hugely imbalanced military status quo on the island, which the international community has condemned and the Security Council has unequivocally considered unacceptable.

The Turkish reactions to the deployment of purely defensive weapons and the construction of a base by the Republic of Cyprus as a shield against further aggression can only be understood in the light of statements such as those made by Mr. Gurel, Minister of State of Turkey, who specifically stated that "there are weapons systems being installed in Cyprus, which are endangering our military supremacy there", or by Mr. Sezgin, Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister, who said that "if [the base] is directed against Turkey it is too little".

It is well known that the Government of the Republic has made the continuation of its defence programme conditional upon a just and viable solution to the Cyprus problem through peaceful means or the demilitarization of the island. Hence, since 1993, President Clerides has submitted a complete proposal for the demilitarization of the island. This proposal is still on the table. Its acceptance by Turkey, or the display of genuine will to consider it seriously, would greatly facilitate, for everyone concerned, dealing with and eventually overcoming the present difficulties.

Moreover, one cannot help but comment on the Turkish Representative's audacity in referring to the Security Council resolutions, which his own country blatantly violates. We challenge Turkey to implement the United Nations resolutions in their totality, withdraw its occupation troops and settlers and restore the human rights of the people of Cyprus as a whole. This would lead automatically to the achievement of peace and thus eliminate the need for defence spending.

Finally, I would like to point out that the threatening statements contained in the letter of the Turkish Representative do not constitute, in any way, a new or, indeed, a surprising element. They simply reflect the consistent pattern of Turkey's foreign policy, which uses threats in order to thwart the legitimate exercise of other countries' rights under international law. Hence, I would urge you to remind the Government of Turkey of its obligations and responsibilities under the Charter of the United Nations, in particular Article 2, paragraph 4.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Sotirios ZACKHEOS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative